

**Testimony of Debra Cohen
in support of
HB 6519, An Act Concerning the Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food**

Friday, March 15, 2013

Good afternoon, members of the Public Health Committee.

My name is Debra Cohen. I live in Wethersfield, CT. I am here today to urge you to support HB6519. I'll keep my comments short as I am joined by so many other people today who are concerned, as I am, that we have the right to know what is in all of the food we buy and share with our families, old and young alike. I speak to you today as a member of the Early Childhood Education profession for over 35 years and as a citizen very concerned about the health not only of myself and my family but the health of human, animal and plant generations to come and, ultimately, the health of the very earth we depend upon to provide our food.

As I came to learn more and more about GMOs that are present in our food with neither adequate testing nor identification on food labels, I became convinced that keeping this information from consumers is wrong and irresponsible.

From a health perspective, I am worried about the lack of definitive evidence that GMOs are safe. Quite the contrary. I have paid close attention to evidence that just the opposite is true. No long term studies have been carried out by either GMO manufacturers or the FDA, each of whom says the other is responsible for proving GMO safety. The only studies sanctioned by the FDA are no longer than 3 months in duration and studies are needed on a longer time line to be definitive. From a consumer perspective, I am outraged that I am being told not to worry, everything is fine and that all I have to do is trust the people who supply the food on the store shelves to keep my family's best interests at heart. The mattress on my bed has a label naming the contents, my clothing all has a tag naming material details, the gasoline I purchase at the gas station is all labeled regarding octane levels so I can make an informed choice about the best outcomes in my car. It is interesting that when it comes to labels about what I am putting in my body, I am most often denied the same level of information. When I first learned about GMOs, I called the companies of nearly every food item in my kitchen cabinets to ask about whether or not their products contained GMOs. Some companies responded by saying they didn't know for sure but the majority of companies responded with the familiar company line that they could assure me their products were completely safe even though they contained GMOs because the FDA has identified them to be safe. I find that response to be laughable, infuriating and insulting at the same time. The connections between Monsanto and the FDA are so interwoven that to consider the FDA as being capable of making independent decisions on this matter is folly.

Long term studies not done by GMO manufacturers or the FDA point to health risks for our bodies and health risks for our environment due the ever rising need for stronger and

stronger pesticides. In many cases, the scientists involved in these studies have lost their positions at universities as well as funding to continue their research. As a teacher of young children, I can testify to the growing incidences of allergies, asthma and autism in our very youngest populations. If there is the slightest chance that the unlabeled ingredients in the food being fed to our children may be making them sick, is it not our responsibility to make informed choices about what we feed them? And if the answer to that question is yes, is it not your responsibility to see to it that we are given the tools we need to make informed choices? It is possible that some of you will never be swayed by the results of scientific studies that show the horrendous health and planetary damage caused by GMOs. I am not asking you to accept those studies but I am asking that you honor my right to know as much as possible about foods that contain them, regardless of their possible impact.

I realize the purpose of our testimonies today is to tell you why we demand the labeling of all GMOs in the food on our grocery shelves so that we can decide what we will and will not put in our bodies. However, I am taking this opportunity to turn things around just a bit and put my final thoughts to you in the form of the following question: On what grounds do you think I am not entitled and do not deserve to know what is in my food? The inconvenience to food companies to make changes to their labels surely isn't as important as the health and well being of the citizens of Connecticut. Please do the right thing and put CT in the forefront of states that demand transparency, clarity and honesty on all food sold within its borders. Please show other states around the country that are fighting for this very thing that CT is a pro-active leader by supporting HB 6519.

Thank you for your time and for doing everything in your legislative power to stand up for the rights of your constituents to make informed choices.